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## A PROPHECY OF CAESAR'S MURDER

(Suetonius *Iulius* 81. 1)

BY MONROE E. DEUTSCH

Among the various portents and prophecies of Julius Caesar's murder alluded to in our sources is the following tale told in the lost account of Cornelius Balbus,<sup>1</sup> and preserved for us in Suetonius *Iulius* 81. 1; no other author (with one possible exception<sup>2</sup>) mentions it even indirectly:

Paucos ante menses, cum in colonia Capua deducti lege Iulia coloni ad extruendas villas vetustissima sepulera disicerent idque eo studiosius facerent, quod aliquantum vasculorum operis antiqui scrutantes reperiebant,<sup>3</sup> tabula aenea in monumento, in quo dicebatur Capys conditor Capuae sepultus, inventa est conscripta litteris verbisque Graecis hac sententia: *quandoque ossa Capyis detecta essent, fore ut illo prognatus manu consanguineorum necaretur magnisque mox Italiae cladibus vindicaretur*. Cuius rei, ne quis fabulosam aut commenticiam putet, auctor est Cornelius Balbus, familiarissimus Caesaris.<sup>4</sup>

The inscription itself is wholly clear, save for one point. Rolfe<sup>5</sup> thus translates the sentence: "Whenever the bones of Capys shall be moved, it will come to pass that a descendant of his shall be slain at the hands of his kindred, and presently avenged at heavy cost to Italy."<sup>6</sup>

A difficulty at once appears: In what way is it possible to speak of Julius Caesar as a descendant of Capys, the Capys who was reputed to be *conditor Capuae*?

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the discussion in Pauly-Wissowa, iv. 1268, *s.v.* *Cornelius*.

<sup>2</sup> Servius; the passage is discussed at length later in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that Strabo (viii. 23) tells how the colonists sent by Caesar to Corinth dug open tombs and found many objects both of pottery and of bronze.

<sup>4</sup> The text is that of Ihm.

<sup>5</sup> Suetonius (*Loeb Classical Library*).

<sup>6</sup> In this paper no attempt is made to enter into a discussion of the question whether such an inscription ever existed or whether we have merely a popular tradition which Suetonius found in Balbus. Moreover, the historical existence of a Capys who was reputed to be the founder of Capua does not concern us. We are merely treating the tale as we might deal with a tale in the *Aeneid*, and endeavoring to discuss it from the point of view of those who accepted it.

Four persons named Capys are mentioned:<sup>1</sup> (1) A king of the Dardanians and father of Anchises: Ennius *Ann.* 23e (Mueller); Ovid *Fasti* iv. 34; Silius Italicus xi. 297, 30, 179-80; Servius on *Aen.* i. 273, v. 30, viii. 130, ix. 640; Servius on *Georg.* iii. 35; *Schol. Verg. Bern. Georg.* i. 502, iii. 35. (2) A descendant of Ascanius, who was king of Alb in Latium: Virgil *Aen.* vi. 768; Ovid *Fasti* iv. 45; Ovid *Met.* xiv. 613 f.; Livy i. 3. 8.; Servius on *Aen.* x. 145. (3) A king of Capua: Livy iv. 37. 1 (cf. also Strabo iv. 242). (4) A companion of Aeneas, who is said to have founded Capua: Virgil *Aen.* i. 183, ii. 35, ix. 576, x. 145; Lucan ii. 393; Statius *Silvae* iii. 5. 77; Servius on *Aen.* i. 242, x. 145 (cf. also Silius xiii. 117 and 321).<sup>2</sup>

Manifestly the first, though clearly an ancestor of Caesar's, was not the founder of Capua in Italy or reputed to be buried there.

The second was a king of Alba and seems to have had no connection with Capua, though in Servius *Aen.* x. 145 it is stated that some thought that the Alban king Capys had founded Capua. Such a practically unknown tale would surely not have formed the basis of the prophecy in Suetonius without special mention.

The third Capys seems to have been neither an ancestor of Caesar nor a Trojan, but a Samnite leader who captured the Etruscan city of Volturnum, later called Capua after his name.

The Capys last mentioned, while frequently referred to as the founder of Capua, is one of Aeneas' *socii* and neither his ancestor nor his descendant.

In connection with this Capys, there is, however, one passage that deserves special attention, since it may seem to some to explain the connection between Caesar and Capys, and it is probably at least in part responsible for the reading *illo*, which, as we shall see later, is an emendation introduced into the text of our author.

The passage appears in Servius' comment on *at Capys* in *Aen.* ii. 35:

non pater Anchisae . . . alii hunc Capyn adfinem Aeneae tradunt, et ideo ei ab Aenea dari recti consilii principatum. hic est qui Capuam

<sup>1</sup> *Capys* in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, Supplementum* 2, 177-78.

<sup>2</sup> See also Roscher, ii. 1. 956-57 (1890-94).

condidit. sed hoc post multa saecula claruit. nam his temporibus, quibus Caesar occidi habuit,<sup>1</sup> Capuae iuvencae aeneae dicitur inscriptum fuisse, isdem temporibus unum de genere conditoris periturum.

The last sentence deserves attention first. It may be translated quite literally: "For in those times in which Caesar was to be killed(?), at Capua there is said to have been an inscription on a brazen bullock(?) that at the same time one of the race of the founder would perish." One of the blood of Capys is to perish at the same time at which some other event occurs. What event? The only other occurrence mentioned is the murder of Caesar; moreover, that these events are to be contemporaneous is made clear by *his temporibus quibus . . . isdem temporibus*. In other words, when Caesar is murdered, one of Capys' descendants will also die.<sup>2</sup> Now the connection between Capys and Caesar is made clear a few lines above: "Alii hunc Capyn adfinem Aeneae tradunt." Accordingly the descendant of Aeneas (i.e. Caesar) is to perish at the same time as a descendant of Capys (*unum de genere conditoris*). Of course, *adfinitas* between Aeneas and Capys would not at all necessarily cause Capys to be an ancestor of Caesar.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed we have another passage in Servius (*Aen.* x. 145) in which he states very directly the precise relationship which some thought existed between Aeneas and Capys: "Coeliusque Troianum Capyn condidisse Capuam tradidit eumque Aeneae fuisse sobrinum." If, as Coelius declared, Capys was a cousin of Aeneas on his mother's side and there was no closer connection between the descendants of the two, then it is perfectly clear that a descendant of Aeneas could not possibly have been also a descendant of Capys.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text may be incorrect. Bergk proposed *occisus est*.

<sup>2</sup> It may possibly mean (though I do not regard this as at all likely) that the deaths of both were to fall on the same day of the same month. Cf. the interesting passage in Suetonius *Caligula* 57: "Capitolium Capuae Id. Mart. de caelo tactum est, item Romae cella Palatini atriensis. Nec defuerunt qui coniectarent altero ostento periculum a custodibus domino portendi, altero caedem rursus insignem, qualis eodem die facta quondam fuisset."

<sup>3</sup> If we accept the statement that Capys was an *adfinis* of Aeneas, still Caesar would not have been a descendant of Capys unless Capys bore some such relationship as the following to Aeneas: father-in-law, son-in-law, husband of the latter's granddaughter or the like. And there is not the shadow of a reason to believe that any one of these was the case.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *C.I.L.*, X, 365.

Whether in the story told in Servius *Aen.* ii. 35 we have a garbled version of Suetonius' account, or it is derived from a common source, or it is a story concerning a totally different incident—in any event we have no statement justifying us in believing that Caesar was a descendant of Capys, the founder of Capua.

The descent of Caesar from Capys is nowhere stated; if accordingly the prophecy in Suetonius was based upon such a belief, undoubtedly this relationship would have been made perfectly evident by our author.

We find therefore that not one of the four legendary persons named Capys is clearly described both as an ancestor of Caesar and the reputed founder of Capua. This difficulty with reference to the descent of Caesar from the Capys who is said to have founded Capua makes one turn to the manuscript reading of the sentence.

We then discover that *illo* in the expression *illo prognatus* is found in not a single one of the MSS cited, but was introduced into the text by Turnebus and Bentley, the former declaring he had MS authority for it.

The manuscripts, as given by Ihm, read as follows:

*ilio*—MHGY.

*iulo*—LO<sup>2</sup>SN<sup>8</sup>

*iulio*—VPO<sup>1</sup> (*sic in R ss. m. rec.*)

*iulius*—T<sup>2</sup>

The reading *ilio* has clearly superior authority to any of the others. *Iulio* is certainly impossible, and *iulius* not worth considering. *Iulo* causes us difficulty; to be sure, the matter of descent would be simple, since the fact that Iulus is Caesar's ancestor is frequently alluded to (indeed one questions whether the reference to Caesar might not be too obvious for a prophecy), but what particular point would there be in having the prediction of the murder of a descendant of Iulus found in the tomb of Capys? Besides, the fact that a reference so obvious as Caesar's descent from Iulus should have been altered to *ilio* and *iulio* in the best manuscripts, causes a query to arise in our minds.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The editions (those at least that I have been able to consult) with very few exceptions read *Iulo prognatus*. Burmann and Ruhnken approve *Ilo prognatus*, and Oudendorp thinks well of it; Voss and the *editio Basiliensis* of 1546 read *Iulio prognatus*. In both of Ihm's editions he accepts the conjecture *illo prognatus*, and in this he is

Accordingly let us look again at the reading *ilio*. Clearly the word is a proper noun, as the corresponding words in the other MS readings are, and the phrase is *Ilio prognatus*. The meaning is obvious, "descendant of Troy" or "Trojan by descent." Caesar was that by common tradition, and we recall that of this descent he made much, so much in fact that he was sneeringly called *Venere prognatus* by Caelius.<sup>1</sup> It might be asked then if this wording does not mean the same as *Iulo prognatus*; it does, but with the greater vagueness appropriate to a prophecy and with emphasis not on the person from whom he was descended, but the place. And this fact, that he is a Trojan by descent, makes the discovery of such an inscription in the tomb of Capys fitting, for Capys too is a Trojan, he is an *Ilio natus*. The *consanguinei* then are *consanguinei* both of Capys and of Caesar in that they also as Romans are Trojans by descent.

That the Romans prided themselves on their blood-tie with Troy needs no proof. Many a verse in the *Aeneid* at once suggests itself. There are of course the familiar verses (i. 19-20):

progeniem sed enim Troiano a sanguine duci  
audierat, Tyrias olim quae verteret arces.

And the prophecy in i. 234 f.:

certe hinc Romanos olim volventibus annis,  
hinc fore ductores revocato a sanguine Teucri,  
qui mare, qui terras omni dicione tenerent.

And most apposite with reference to the expression *Ilio prognatus* is *Aen.* i. 286:

nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar.

The Romans gloried in this tie,<sup>2</sup> and so too did the Caesars.

followed by Rolfe and the edition of Westcott and Rankin. The reading *Ilio* is not only found in the manuscripts previously named, but was also independently conjectured by Salmasius. Torrentius in discussing the conjecture *illo* and the reading *Iulo* says: "Verum quid Capys ad Caesarem? aut cur in eius sepulchro de Iuli posteris? quare *Ilio* magis placet."

<sup>1</sup> Cic. *Fam.* viii. 15. 2; cf. also a *Venere orti* in Suet. *Iul.* 49. 3, and Lucan iii. 2. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Says Tacitus (*Annals* ii. 54): "Igitur adito Ilio quaeque ibi varietate fortunae et nostri origine veneranda," and Livy (xxxvii. 37. 3): "Iliensibus in omni rerum verborumque honore ab se oriundos Romanos praeferentibus et Romanis laetis origine sua." Cf. also Justin xxxi. 8.

It will be recalled that there was even a rumor, mentioned both by Suetonius and Nicolaus of Damascus,<sup>1</sup> that Caesar planned to move the capital of the empire to Troy, *διὰ τὴν παλαιὰν πρὸς τὸ Δαρδανιδῶν γένος συγγένειαν*, as Nicolaus says. Moreover, he elevated Ilium to the status of a *civitas libera et immunis*.<sup>2</sup>

A question with reference to grammatical usage will at once naturally present itself: Did the Romans speak of a person as the son or descendant of a city or other place?<sup>3</sup> Burmann deals with the question by saying: "Rectius homo prognatus viro quam urbe dicitur"; this does not, however, tell us whether such a use is possible, for of course we concede that it will naturally be less common than that wherein descent from a person is mentioned. But Draeger<sup>4</sup> clearly recognizes such a usage, saying in his discussion of the ablative of source: "Nothwendig auch *ab* bei Angabe des Ortes, aus welchem Jemand her stammt. . . . Bei Städtenamen natürlich auch mit blossen Ablativ."

The following examples of this use wherein origin or descent from a place is mentioned have been noted:<sup>5</sup>

*oriundus*—Ennius in Prob. on *Georg.* ii. 506; Lucil. 247; Livy i. 20. 3, i. 23. 1, i. 52. 2, viii. 22. 5, xxi. 7. 2, xxiv. 6. 2, xxv. 15. 7, xxvi. 19. 11, xxvii. 30. 9, xxx. 16. 4, xxxii. 15. 8, and xxxiv. 9. 1; *Ard. templi inscr.* in Baehr., *P.L.M.*, VI, 1138; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Carus 5. 3, Pescennius Niger 7. 5, Probus 3. 1, and Severus 1. 1; *Eutropius* viii. 18. 1, ix. 13. 1, ix. 19. 2, x. 4. 1. Cf. also Plautus *Poen.* 1054–55, Livy xxvi. 13. 16, and *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Severus 18. 3.

*ortus*—Varro *L.L.* 5. 20. 101; Nepos *Cato* 1. 1. 13; Virg. *Aen.* vii. 206–7; Tacitus *Agr.* 4; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Hadrian. 1. 1 and 1. 2; *Carm. Lat. Epigr.* 1252. 1 (in *Anthol. Lat.* ii. 2). Cf.

<sup>1</sup> Suet. *Iul.* 79. 3 and Nic. Dam. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo xiii. 27 and Lucan ix. 998–99.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Plato *Leg.* iii. 659a: *ποιμένων ὄντων Περσῶν, τραχείας χώρας ἐκγόνων* and Dionys. Hal. 6. 9: *πόλει τῇ γενομένην*.

<sup>4</sup> *Histor. Syntax der latein. Sprache*, I<sup>2</sup>, 518; cf. also Bennett, *Syntax of Early Latin*, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these examples may be believed by others to contain a locative idea rather than one of origin; on the other hand, a considerable number of instances has been omitted wherein it was felt that the idea was perhaps one of place.

also Cic. *In L. Calpurnium Pisonem* fr. 3, Virg. *Aen.* iii. 167 and vii. 240, Hor. *Sat.* ii. 4. 33, Ovid *Her.* 15. 24, and Tacitus *Ann.* 16. 21. 7.

*genitus*—*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Alexander Severus* 1. 2, *Aurelianus* 3. 2, *Maximi Duo* 1. 5; *C.I.L.*, XIII, 8371. Cf. Cic. *de Leg.* ii. 2. 5, *de Re Publica* i. 4. 8, *Pro Flacco* 26. 62 (cf. Isoc. *Paneg.* 24–25 <45c>); Val. Max. 5. 3. 5, *Ext.* 2; Suet. *Vita Verg.* 36; Just. xi. 4. 4; *Carm. Lat. Epigr.* 1175. 1, 1276. 1, and 1312. 3.

*proditus*—Acc. 520.

*conceptus*—Cic. *N.D.* iii. 23. 59.

*satus*—Ovid *Met.* 14. 778.

*cretus*—*Carm. Hyg. fab.* 221, p. 130, 21;<sup>1</sup> Sil. 3. 249.

*creatus*—Ovid *Met.* 13. 358–59; Manil. 2. 40; Sil. 9. 404; Auson. *Ludus Sept. Sap.* 10. 1. Cf. Cic. *de Leg.* ii. 3, 6, Catull. 36. 11, Sil. 16. 473, Mart. 10. 103. 1–2, *C.I.L.*, VI., 3452.

*editus*—cf. Ovid *Her.* 7. 59–60 and *Tristia* iv. 10. 5.

*natus*—Cic. *Pro Sestio* 22. 50; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Aurelian.* 3. 1, *Carm. Lat. Epigr.* 1267. 1. Cf. Ennius *Ann.* 52.

*prognatus*—cf. Hor. *Sat.* ii. 1. 26.

*generatus*—Virg. *Aen.* v. 61. Cf. Seneca *Phaedra* 274.

The Virgilian passage illustrating the usage with *generatus*, runs as follows: “Troia generatus Acestes.” This is one of the most interesting parallels to the passage in Suetonius, for here we clearly have an ablative of source, using the name of a city, indeed the very same city, and employing no preposition.<sup>2</sup>

The question may be raised whether Suetonius shows any other example of the use of the name of a city or the like as an ablative of source. It would, to be sure, not be necessary to find one, as this is merely a rendering of an inscription, not an unhampered expression of Suetonius. But we do find the following examples in our author: *Tiberius* 1. 1; “Patricia gens Claudia . . . orta est ex Regillis oppido Sabinorum.” *Otho* 1.1: “Maiores Othonis orti sunt oppido Ferentio, familia vetere et honorata atque ex principibus Etruriae.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Called Ablative of Place in the *Thesaurus*.

<sup>2</sup> As Sabbadini notes: “Troia qui è personificata.”

<sup>3</sup> Dalmasso (*La Grammatica di Suetonio Tranquillo*, p. 57) classifies this as an ablative of place.



Clearly therefore the usage whereby a person is spoken of as sprung from a city or other place exists in Latin, being found particularly in poetry and in later Latin, and having indeed two examples in Suetonius. This usage appears, to be sure, most frequently with *ortus* and *oriundus*,<sup>1</sup> but instances have been cited with *genitus*, *satus*, *generatus*, and *natus*.<sup>2</sup>

If therefore we accept the best MS reading and restore *Ilio prognatus*, we are employing a grammatical usage that has sufficient authority, not only in later Latin, but also in Suetonius himself.

On the other hand, the reading *illo prognatus* decidedly needs support. For then we should have a pronoun used without a preposition in the ablative of source construction. And, as Kühner<sup>3</sup> points out, with a pronoun thus employed a preposition is *regularly* used; moreover "nothwendig ist die Präposition *ab* wenn nicht unmittelbare, sondern entferntere Abkunft bezeichnet wird," Draeger points out.<sup>4</sup>

Besides, the only examples I have noted in Suetonius showing the use of the pronoun in this construction, employ the preposition:

*Caligula* 25. 3: *patrem infantis ex ea natae*.

*Claudius* 24. 1: *ingenuos ex his procreatos*.

*Nero* 4: *ex hoc Domitius nascitur*.

*Nero* 6: *ex se . . . nasci*.

*Otho* 1. 2: *procreatum ex eo*.

It is, moreover, to be observed that all of these examples deal with direct descent, and that no example has been found wherein Suetonius uses a pronoun in this construction with reference to remote ancestry.

<sup>1</sup> Kühner, *Ausführliche lateinische Grammatik*, II, No. 1 (1914), 377: "Wird mit *ortus* (*oriundus*) die Heimat angegeben, so gelten im allgemeinen dieselben Regeln wie bei Städtenamen."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also Catullus 37. 18 *Celtiberiae filius*; Virg. *Aen.* x. 172 *Populonia mater*; Sil. i. 659 *genetricis . . . Troiae*, v. 543 *mater Anagnia*, and xvii. 426-27 *Mantua . . . genetriz*.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.* ii. 1. 376 (Anmerkung 6). Bennett (*Syntax of Early Latin*, p. 292) says: "The preposition *ex* is regularly used with the personal pronouns, as in the classical period."

<sup>4</sup> *Histor. Syntax der latein. Sprache*, I<sup>2</sup>, 518.

The emendation *illo*, accordingly, not only involves great difficulty with reference to the question of Caesar's descent from Capys, but also introduces a very irregular grammatical usage, one for which no parallel in Suetonius has been found.

We therefore turn to the reading having the best MS authority, *Ilio*. And with this reading the point in finding the inscription in the tomb of Capys is clear—he, a Trojan, is the source of a prophecy concerning one who is Trojan by descent; the latter's death *manu consanguineorum* will be at the hands of those of his own race, i.e. those also Trojans by blood.<sup>1</sup>

And just as Caesar is here called *Ilio prognatus*, so is Romulus termed by Ovid<sup>2</sup> *Iliades*, and so too is the following prophecy addressed to the Romans in Livy:<sup>3</sup> *Amnem, Troiugena, fuge Cannam*.

The correct reading is accordingly that having the best manuscript authority, *Ilio prognatus*, the reading approved by Salmasius, Gronovius, and Torrentius, but rejected by all modern editors of Suetonius.

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting passage wherein the Trojans are spoken of as *consanguinei* of the Romans is to be found in Suetonius *Claud.* 25. 4: "si consanguineos suos Ilienses ab omni onere immunes praestitisset." And just before this (*Claud.* 25. 3) we have the expression *Iliensibus quasi Romanae gentis auctoribus*. Of significance too is Dio xlv. 37. 3, wherein Antony says of Caesar: *πρώτον μὲν τῆς πόλεως ἡμῶν ὅλης συγγενῆς ἐστιν* (ἐκ γὰρ ὧν οὗτος ἐγεννήθη, πρὸς τούτων ἡμεῖς φέκισθμεν).

<sup>2</sup> *Amores* iii. 4. 40.

<sup>3</sup> xxv. 12. 5.